NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5888 JUNE 5, 1978
WAYNE COREY/RANGOON

BURMA AND NARCOTICS SUPPRESSION

ANNCR:

THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN MAKING AN INTENSIFIED EFFORT TO REDUCE THE FLOW OF OPIUM OUT OF THE REMOTE SHAN STATE INTO RANGOON AND INTO WESTERN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES. THERE ARE SIGNS OF LIMITED BUT NOT INSIGNIFICANT SUCCESS....AS WE HEAR IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT BY VOA'S WAYNE COREY IN RANGOON.

TEXT:

THE BATTLE AGAINST NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS IN THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE -- THE AREA WHERE THE THAI, LAO AND BURMESE BORDERS MEET -- IS A NEVER ENDING ONE REQUIRING COOPERATION ON AN INTERNATIONAL SCALE. BURMA BELIEVES IT'S DOING ITS SHARE BY TRYING TO INTERDICT AND DISRUPT THE FLOW OF NARCOTICS AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THE SOURCE. AT THE SAME TIME, IT BELIEVES THAILAND COULD DO MUCH MORE.

ABOUT FOUR YEARS AGO THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT ADDICTION TO HEROIN -- A DERIVATIVE OF OPIUM -- WAS NOT JUST A PROBLEM IN THE STREETS OF NEW YORK AND OTHER MAJOR WORLD CITIES. THE CHILDREN OF SENIOR BURMESE MILITARY OFFICERS WERE LIABLE TO BECOME HEROIN ADDICTS THEMSELVES OR TO BECOME INVOLVED IN TRAFFICKING. IN FACT PRESIDENT NE WIN'S SON IS IN JAIL ON NARCOTICS CHARGES.

FOR SEVERAL YEARS THE BURMESE ARMY HAS INTERCEPTED OPIUM CARAVANS, DESTROYED REFINERIES, AND SEIZED RECORD QUANTITIES OF ILLICIT NARCOTICS. THE UNITED STATES HELPS BY GIVING BURMA HELICOPTERS WHICH VASTLY INCREASE THE BURMESE ARMY'S MOBILITY. BU INFORMED SOURCES SAY THAT LAST YEAR ONLY TWO LARGE OPIUM CARAVANS

WERE DETECTED MOVING FROM NORTHEASTERN BURMA TOWARDS THAILAND, COMPARED WITH FIFTEEN OR SIXTEEN THE YEAR BEFORE. IN ADDITION NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS ARE INCREASINGLY TRANSPORTING DRUGS IN THE SMALLER AND WIDELY DISPERSED CARAVANS TO AVOID DETECTION AND CAPTURE.

INFORMED SOURCES BELIEVE THIS PATTERN SUGGESTS THAT THE TRADITIONAL MOVEMENT OF OPIUM CARAVANS HAS BEEN DISRUPTED AND TRAFFICKERS MAY EVEN BE SEARCHING FOR NEW ROUTES, POSSIBLY ONES THAT WOULD OPIUM OR HEROIN INTO BANGLADESH.

THE TRAFFICKERS ARE RESOURCEFUL, AND INSURGENT GROUPS OPERATING IN THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE MUST RELY ON MONEY OBTAINED FROM ILLICIT DRUGS TO BUY ARMS AND EQUIPMENT. THEY SAY THEY HAVE NO INTEREST IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING BEYOND THIS. THE SHAN UNITED ARMY FIGHTING FOR THE SHAN STATE'S AUTONOMY AND ALSO REMNANTS OF THE OLD CHINESE KUOMINGTANG, HAVING NO TIES WITH TAIWAN, ARE ALSO HEAVILY INVOLVED IN NARCOTICS. THE BURMESE COMMUNISTS ALSO TAX OPIUM CARAVANS TO MEET SOME OF THEIR FINANCIAL NEEDS.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM IS THAT THE BURMESE ARMY CANNOT PENETRATE HUGE AREAS OF THE NORTHEAST WHICH ARE CONTROLLED BY REBEL GROUPS. UNTIL IT CAN, THE BEST EFFORT TO INTERDICT AND SUPPRESS THE FLOW OF DRUGS FROM THAT AREA CAN ONLY REDUCE THE QUANTITY OF NARCOTICS THAT WILL EVENTUALLY REACH WESTERN EUROPE OR THE UNITED STATES. MEANWHILE THE FORMER KING OF THE OPIUM WAR LORDS, LO HSING-HAN, STILL LANGUISHES IN A BURMESE PRISON WHERE HE IS SERVING A LIFE SENTENCE. IN A WAY HE SYMBOLIZES THE STIFF PRICE MAJOR NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS USUALLY PAY FOR THEIR CAPTURE. BUT THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT AND DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENTS KNOW THERE ARE MANY OTHER TRAFFICKERS WILLING TO TAKE HIS PLACE.

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JS/RTD